DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 038 CS 508 445

AUTHOR Epstein, Susan B.
TITLE Does Style Negate Substance? The Use of Argument in Parliamentary Debate.
PUB DATE Nov 93
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (79th, Miami Beach, FL, November 18-21, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Skills; *Debate; *Debate Format; Higher Education; Parliamentary Procedures; *Persuasive Discourse
IDENTIFIERS *Debate Tournaments

ABSTRACT

Two debate rounds offered at the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) illustrate how debate could offer both style (the ability to communicate well) and substance (a message of significance and purpose). With the resolution "idealism is better than realism," debaters and judges were transported into a "Popeye" cartoon. Both teams ended up arguing in favor of Popeye breaking up with Olive Oyl but for different reasons: it was the ideal thing to do according to the government team, and the realistic thing to do according to the opposition. However, the Popeye round fails to pass the tests for effective arguments by example--the example of Popeye is not relevant, only one example is offered, and the example is not typical. Problems arise when parliamentary debaters argue by example and attempt to use examples as claims. Another debate resolved that "this house should tear down walls." The government team discussed tearing down walls in relation to the barriers that keep the United States from funding the space program, and the "house" was the appropriations committee. The government team and the opposition team provided legitimate arguments supported by general knowledge evidence to produce a superior debate about real issues. Unfortunately, parliamentary debate does not always have argumentation at its heart because examples are being offered as claims rather than as evidence. Style and effective delivery are important to the development of competitive debate, but style should not be a substitute for substance. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 366 038

Does Style Negate Substance?
The Use of Argument in Parliamentary Debate

Susan B. Epstein

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Epstein

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

University of Southern Colorado
Department of Speech Communication
2200 Bonforte Boulevard
Pueblo, Colorado

CS508445

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Does Style Negate Substance?
The Use Argument in Parliamentary Debate

Susan B. Epstein
University of Southern Colorado

In the Western United States, we are now in our second year of competitive parliamentary debating. Including parliamentary debate within the traditional tournament setting should encourage participation by students not generally interested in debate. Gwendolyn Fayne in the *Journal of the Western States Parliamentary Debate Association* identifies the "noticeable absence of traditional persuasive arts in all forms of current intercollegiate, tournament debate [CEDA and NDT] " (38). Coaches and judges regularly commiserate on the current state of debate, and the problems associated with rapid delivery and incomprehensible speech. Parliamentary debate seems to be an alternative that will bring persuasion back to debate.

In this paper, I will discuss the use of arguments in parliamentary debate. Today, I plan to investigate the question "Does style negate substance?" by comparing two typical debates from the Western States Parliamentary Debate Association Spring Championships Tournament. In the *CEDA Yearbook*, Robert Trapp argues that "Debate is in trouble because its practitioners have lost their focus on argumentation" (23). While Trapp specifically refers to

CEDA debate, this lack of focus on argumentation clearly carries into the realm of parliamentary debate. This study is not meant to be comprehensive, but I believe it is representative of the kinds of arguments that are being offered in NPDA (National Parliamentary Debate Association) rounds. By examining these debate rounds, I hope to illustrate how parliamentary debate could offer both style, the ability to communicate well, and substance, a message of significance and purpose.

During the Western States Parliamentary Debate Spring Championship Tournament, February 26-28, 1993, I was transported into a cartoon. With the resolution "Idealism is better than realism," I became Popeye concerned with my relationship with Olive Oyl. The government team (from the University of New Mexico) argued that Olive Oyl has problems. The main arguments were:

1. she's not faithful;
2. she's a poor conversationalist;
3. she has a strength fetish;
4. she's dependent;
5. she doesn't share Popeye's interests;
6. she hurts Popeye physically (getting him into fights with Brutus) and emotionally (he has to constantly fight to win her love).

The Government team linked their arguments to the resolution by defining realism in terms of the current situation and idealism as a need to find someone better.

(from the University of Wyoming) argued that it is more realistic to face the situation squarely. Both teams end up arguing in favor of Popeye breaking up with Olive Oyl. This is the ideal thing to do according to the government, and the realistic thing to do according to the opposition.

In the Popeye debate, Popeye was offered both as claim and evidence to support the resolution. Freeley offers questions that should be asked as a way of testing the efficacy of reasoning by example. When we examine the problems of arguing by example, we will see that the Popeye case passes none of the tests:

1. Is the example relevant?
2. Is there a reasonable number of examples?
3. Do the examples cover a critical period of time?
4. Are the examples typical? (164-66)

As we examine the Popeye round, we can see that it does not pass the tests for effective argument by example. The example of Popeye is not relevant in terms of the resolution. How can a fictional character be relevant in terms of a discussion of realism and idealism? The answer is simply that Popeye is not realistic and therefore not relevant.

Only one example is offered by the government--that of a fictional character. The opposition could easily argue that Popeye is not only irrelevant, but also unreasonable. As a cartoon character, Popeye lives in a world that could

be described as idealistic (no one ages, gets hurt, and Popeye and Olive always end up together). As an example to prove this resolution true, Popeye falls far short. Given the philosophical nature of the resolution, time is not important to the debate or the example, so the third test is unnecessary.

This argument also fails the fourth test of argument by example. The example of Popeye is not typical. Popeye does not represent or demonstrate the way a real person would respond in interpersonal conflict (Popeye can, after all, eat a can of spinach to survive any ordeal, and Olive Oyl always comes running back to him in the end). Because the example is not a realistic one, the example cannot hope to be typical.

When we examine arguments presented like the Popeye case, we end up looking at essentially unwarranted arguments. Claims are advanced by the government. These claims, however, are not supported. Claims are left as inferential leaps. Common knowledge evidence is assumed rather than explained. The government shouldn't take evidence for granted. Examples need to be used to support claims. Popeye, however is used in place of actual arguments.

We are guilty of several fallacies when we elect to prove a resolution true by the use of examples. Most

obviously, we are likely to look at arguments that are hasty generalizations. This occurs when we jump to conclusions based on inadequate evidence. When the argument itself is the example, this is certain to occur. "The process of reasoning by example consists of inferring conclusions from specific cases" (Freeley, 164). In parliamentary debate, these specific cases are being offered as arguments. Many of the debates that I have judged in the past year have committed the same fallacy as the Popeye debate, which is the tendency to argue by example. In parliamentary debate, examples are important. Examples are the only type of evidence available for debaters to use. The problem arises when debaters (particularly government teams) argue by example and attempt to use examples as claims. Debates like this one are more style than substance. The speakers were effective, but clarity and use of humor are insignificant when the case that lacks significant content. The government team should not take a legitimate and interesting resolution and turn it into a cartoon.

At the same tournament, I judged a debate on the resolution "This house should tear down walls." This was a much better debate in terms of the strength of the arguments and the development of a link. In this debate, there was both style and substance. The government team (from the Air Force Academy) discussed tearing down walls in relation to

the barriers that keep the United States from funding the space program, and the "house" was the appropriations committee. This link is stronger and more realistic. The government presented three main arguments:

1. Technological advances that come with the development of the space program;
2. The national pride of competing in the space race;
3. The educational benefits of being in space.

These are claims, which the government team supported through the use of examples. Here, examples were effectively applied to the resolution and the arguments.

One of the examples used in the first argument is the development of velcro (now in everyday use). In the second argument they applied historical examples and talked about the national heroes that came from the space program, and the pride we gained as the first nation to land on the moon. In the third argument, they discussed the use of the shuttle program as a new laboratory for finding cures for diseases as medical science examines the effect gravity has on different substances. These examples are effective in demonstrating the resolution as interpreted by the government team.

The opposition (from Creighton University) began by looking at other problems within the government at the level of the appropriations committee ("this house"). By arguing that the appropriations committee is irresponsible with

government funds they focused the debate on the issue of money rather than continued space exploration. The main argument from the opposition becomes at what cost to other programs do we increase funding to the space program. As evidence, the opposition argues that the government cannot afford to allocate more money to the space program. Examples are offered by the opposition, like the problems of the budget deficit, and homelessness. They also argue that the current rate of funding is adequate for achieving the benefits gained by the government team; thereby negating the resolution as defined by the government.

By dealing with the resolution on a content level first and presenting that content through the use of effective communication skills, I am able to enjoy a superior debate. This debate offers much more in the way of both style and substance. We are able to briefly explore a real issue while at the same time having a lively interchange of ideas. Intellectually, this was a much better debate because it provided legitimate arguments supported by general knowledge evidence (which is what parliamentary debate is designed to do).

Parliamentary debate should provide an opportunity for students to practice argumentation. For argumentation to be effective, we should focus on content or substance. Style, that is, delivery should support the content, not take the

place of content. Parliamentary debate should be "promoting a form of limited preparation debate which combines an emphasis on both content (analysis, refutation, context) and delivery (style, wit, humor, audience adaptation, vocal attributes and body movement)" (WSPDA, 81).

Debate should have at its heart argumentation. Unfortunately, parliamentary debate does not always do this because examples are being offered as claims rather than as evidence. Debate should teach people to reason critically and rationally. Debate without claims cannot teach argumentation. When this occurs, debate is empty and pointless. We see this happening in all debate. We must push for the advancement of claims for argumentation and parliamentary debate to flourish.

> "Argumentation is the communicative process of advancing, supporting, criticizing, and modifying claims so that appropriate decision makers may grant or deny adherence" (Rieke and Sillars, 1).

We should be able to find the kind of argumentation that Rieke and Sillars define in every parliamentary debate round. In order for competitive parliamentary debating to be successful, we must teach our students how to argue. Coaches mistakenly think that anyone can walk into a parliamentary debate round with a copy of the rules and present a case. While this may be more true in

parliamentary debate than in other forms of debate, we must put the focus on argumentation first. With effective argumentation comes effective style and substance, and that is what we should be seeking from debate.

By comparing two debates from the Western States Parliamentary Debate Association Spring Championship Tournament, I have explained the problems I see with the use of arguments in parliamentary debate. Style and effective delivery are important to the development of competitive debate, but style should not be a substitute for substance. As parliamentary debate continues to develop under the guise of the National Parliamentary Debate Association, we must insist on both style and substance.

Works Cited

Constitution. The Western States Parliamentary Debate Association. Art. II, sec. 1. April, 1992.

Fayne, Gwendolyn D. "Parliamentary Debate: A Call for Faculty Involvement." *Parliamentary Debate: The Journal of the Western States Parliamentary Debate Association* 1 (1992) 38-50.

Freeley, Austin J. *Argumentation and Debate: Critical Thinking for Reasoned Decision Making, 8th ed.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993.

Rieke, Richard D. and Malcolm O. Sillars. *Argumentation and Critical Decision Making, 3rd ed.* New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993.

Trapp, Robert. "The Need for an Argumentative Perspective for Academic Debate." *CEDA Yearbook* 14 (1993) 23-33.